

# JUMP CUT

## A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

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*Jump Cut*, No. 55, fall 2013

### Bringing out Baby Jane: camp, sympathy, and the horror-woman's film of the 1960s

by [David Greven](#)

The established precedent for modern horror is Hitchcock's 1960 *Psycho*, which, David Thomson has argued, "taught America to love murder."<sup>[1]</sup> [\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) "Many others would follow *Psycho*'s successful reinvention of the horror genre—locating it squarely in the Freudian family and showcasing newly explicit onscreen violence. "Hard-boiled action director Robert Aldrich would begin a new horror formula by casting Hollywood's aging leading ladies in roles as psychopathic gothic grotesques: Bette Davis and Joan Crawford in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962)," the first of a long list of such films.<sup>[2]</sup>

These *horror-woman's films*, as I call them, continue the tradition of the classical Hollywood genre of the woman's film while holding this genre up to often withering scrutiny, a deconstructive maneuver *avant la lettre*.<sup>[3]</sup> I will discuss three specific films starring Davis and Crawford—Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, starring Davis and Crawford; *Hush...Hush, Sweet Charlotte*, Aldrich's 1964 follow-up to *Baby Jane?*, starring Davis and de Havilland, with support from Agnes Moorehead; William Castle's *Strait-Jacket*, (1964), a Crawford vehicle—and their liminal relation to the woman's film and to modern horror.<sup>[4]</sup>

Clearly, the history of the woman's film, the evolution from "female weepie" to "chick-flick," needs a much more expansive historical account than I can provide here. Any proper analysis of this topic would need to account for the made-for-TV film from the 1970s to the 1990s; the Lifetime channel and its wide array of content ranging from the TV-movie genre it has kept alive to its various original and re-run TV series; cable TV series such as HBO's *Sex and the City* <sup>[5]</sup> which self-consciously and explicitly evoke the woman's film, and the more recent *Girls*; and so forth. Moreover, the extraordinary cross-fertilization of the woman's film with other genres, which has been expertly delineated by Jeannine Basinger, such as noir, horror, science-fiction, biopic, screwball comedy, romantic comedy, spy thriller, rape-revenge film, et al, needs to be included in any analysis. Basinger offers a persuasive description of what constitutes the classical

Hollywood woman's film: it is one that "places at the center of its universe a female who is trying to deal with emotional, social, and psychological problems that are specifically connected to the fact that she is a woman." [6]

The horror-woman's films of the '60s define the liminal. They exist in a shadowy realm between the woman's film, or woman's picture, which, by most accounts, fell out of prominence by the end of the 1950s and later (Andrew Ross, in his essay on Camp, quotes Bette Davis's comment that the 1960 *Baby Jane* was the first woman's film in ten years), more "modern" versions of the woman's film. The post-classical woman's film of the 1970s—*Lady Sings the Blues* (Sidney J. Furie, 1972), *The Way We Were* (Sydney Pollack, 1973), *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Martin Scorsese, 1974), *An Unmarried Woman* (Paul Mazursky, 1978)—transitioned fairly seamlessly into the star vehicles of the 1980s, headlined by Meryl Streep, Jessica Lange, Sissy Spacek, Diane Keaton, and others. After the 1980s, certainly other woman's films, or, perhaps more aptly put, female-centered dramas were made, ranging from *What's Love Got to Do With It* (Brian Gibson, 1993) to *The Brave One* (Neil Jordan, 2007) to *Eat Pray Love* (Ryan Murphy, 2010).

The horror-woman's film, along with many others kinds of '60s films, defines this transitional decade's relationship to the classical Hollywood past, marked by simultaneously maintained attitudes of nostalgic reverence and bitter, ironic contempt. Immediately inspired by *Psycho*, films such as *Baby Jane* also reflect a new kind of explicit horror that emphasizes onscreen violence and gore, as opposed to the atmospheric, stylized, suggestive horror exemplified by the films produced by Val Lewton, exemplified by *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942). As I argue in my book *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, horror film in its modern, post-*Psycho* form crucially overlaps with the evolving woman's film genre. Many female-centered horror movies, such as *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976), *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) and its sequels, and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), can be described, to rework the theories of Robert B. Ray, as *concealed woman's films*. *concealed woman's films*. [8] The *Baby Jane*-style movies of the '60s paved the way for later horror movies that made femininity their central, troubling and troubled, subject. Indeed, as the decade was ending, Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) would make contemporary youthful femininity, embodied by elfin and fragile Mia Farrow as the heroine, the center of modern horror and relegate the older woman once again to the supporting role. Ruth Gordon's busybody older woman neighbor Minnie Castavet, forever dispensing barbiturate-laced concoctions to Farrow's unsuspecting Rosemary and part of a secret Manhattan witches' coven, primarily exists to terrorize the young heroine. With its themes of Satanic birth and the violation of a young wife and mother, *Rosemary's Baby* resonated for audiences, who experienced, in the incipient feminist moment of the film's release, its fragile heroine's suffering and vulnerability as newly urgent. (In contrast, Polanski's 1965 *Repulsion* figures woman's sexuality itself as inherently terrifying.) [9]

For the most part, the films are associated today with the gay male appropriation of them that can be generally classified as a Camp response. One of the first encounters I ever had with the phenomenon of Camp was the birthday card a friend gave me when I was a freshman in college. The card was a still from *Baby Jane*, with Bette Davis's line to the wheelchair-bound Joan Crawford printed in a balloon, in all-caps: "Butcha are, Blanche, ya are!" Jane, played by Davis, is responding, after a reflective pause, to Blanche's (Crawford's) searching statement, "Jane, you couldn't treat me this way if I weren't in this

wheelchair.” I had watched the film on the Channel 5's Saturday Night Movie Club (Channel 5 being then, for the New York Metropolitan area, what today is known as the Fox channel) and had experienced it as a searing, scary, sad drama. That postcard was my first encounter with an entirely distinct, complex world in which films like *Baby Jane* lived, the world unto itself of Camp.

Given that the premise of the film, until its climax, is that evil Jane put her sister Blanche in that wheelchair by crashing her car into her deliberately, Jane's swerve towards manic defiance (“But you are, Blanche—you *are* in that wheelchair!”) is central to Davis's characterization of an increasingly sadistic, sociopathic, and ultimately pitiable personality. It is also central to the Camp aesthetic, as is Davis's delivery of the line, which the balloon print (“Butcha!” for “But you...” ) simulates. When Jane wheels around and throws Blanche's pleading back in her face, she offers a Camp response. As David Halperin discusses in *How to Be Gay*, the political uses of women's melodrama by gay men “can be summed up in a single, simple formula: *to turn tragedy into melodrama*.”

As Halperin continues,

“The historical function of gay male culture has been—and its ongoing political task remains—to forge an ironic perspective on scenes of compulsory, socially validated and enforced performance, to decommission supposedly authentic social identities and return them to their status as willfully or witlessly iterated roles.”[10]

Jane's indifference to Blanche's suffering violates social propriety and, I would add, the entire discourse of sentimental culture that has defined American constructions of femininity since the nineteenth-century, as Lauren Berlant has shown.[11] I am left wondering, however, about the moment before Davis/Jane wheels around to unleash her “Butcha are.” After Blanche raises the suggestion of incrimination that is an appeal to her sympathy, Jane pauses, reflecting on the painful suggestion that she is responsible for Blanche's suffering, and therefore should at least empathize with her. Reflective, human, vulnerable, exposed, Jane in this moment could conceivably attempt to join Blanche in sympathy. That she does not, that she offers her defiant and now Camp response, can be interpreted many ways—one of these being the film's interest in demonstrating a breakdown in sympathy and kinship. As I will explain, this is the queer—as opposed to the Camp—resonance of *Baby Jane*.

The Camp response to the films has so thoroughly framed their reception in the past four decades that discussing their significance—to say nothing of their radicalism—is necessarily to challenge these film's seemingly inextricable associations with Camp. Such a challenge itself creates a set of difficulties that will need to be worked through in order to arrive at a new understanding of the films that is neither hostile nor indifferent to Camp but also refuses a certain thorough immersion in Camp principles that, while keeping the legacy of the films alive, has made it almost impossible to think about their significance in any other register.

One implicit effect of the Camp framing of these films has been their subsequent exclusion from other kinds of analyses. Though an immense body of rigorous feminist scholarship exists on the classical Hollywood woman's film, comparatively little feminist work has been done on “campy” horror-woman's films of the 1960s. With the powerful

exception of Peggy Phelan's experimental, poetic analysis of *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* in her brilliant *Mourning Sex*, there is no major feminist film theory treatment of which I am aware of the cycle of horror-woman's films of the 1960s.[12] (I would be happy to be proven wrong on this finding.) And to the extent that these films have been discussed in feminist terms, they have not been well-received.

In her classic study *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell notes that '60s horror films made "complete travesties" of once-great stars like Davis and Crawford.[13] Discussing the classical horror film, Linda Williams writes, in her well-known essay "When the Woman Looks,"

"There is not that much difference between an object of desire and an object of horror as far as the male look is concerned. (In one brand of horror this difference may simply lie in the age of its female stars. The Bette Davises and the Joan Crawfords considered too old to continue as spectacle-objects nevertheless persevere as horror-objects in *Whatever [sic] Happened to Baby Jane* and *Hush...Hush Sweet Charlotte*.)"[14]

An immediate response to Williams is that most of the stars of the horror-woman's film—Davis especially—were rarely presented as sexual objects who incited the male gaze. Indeed, as Davis herself frequently remarked, her primary audience was women, in the occasional company of the husbands they managed to drag along with them. (Davis seems to have been made aware only much later that many of the members of her audience were gay men. Sadly, Davis, by all accounts, wasn't very receptive to this aspect of her fanbase.) She also turned down a later Aldrich picture with explicit lesbian themes, *The Killing of Sister George*, from 1968. The lesbian potentialities of Davis's oeuvre has been brilliantly discussed by Patricia White in *Uninvited* and by Peggy Phelan in *Mourning Sex* but has not been frequently explored elsewhere.) I would posit that while the female stars may indeed be horror objects here, part of what is "horrifying" about seeing them in horror-women's films is that they have insisted on persisting not only beyond the moment of their career-heyday but beyond the moment of the legitimacy of the genre that made them famous. Their signature genre has died off, but they, as stars, have gone on living.

Writing in accord with Linda Williams, Vivian Sobchack notes,

"such horror and SFfilms dramatize what one psychotherapist describes as the culture's 'almost visceral disgust for the older woman as a physical being,' and they certainly underscore 'ageism' as 'the last bastion of sexism.' These films recall, particularly in the male—and self—disgust they generate," the work of Simone de Beauvoir, in which she laments woman's own fear of aging."[15]

This "almost visceral disgust" is not, I would argue, the chief response of women and gay men, these films' chief audience. Moreover, if horror-woman's films do indeed produce these attitudes of disgust, that is not all that they do. They reclaim bodies and identities that fall outside of their normative dictates. Along with their more questionable maneuvers of making their stars' aging bodies something of a freakshow entertainment, the films establish, maintain, and evince sympathy for their female protagonists, however wildly off-putting, erratic, or unkempt they may be.[16]

My challenge—both to myself and to Camp discourse, and also to feminist film theory—is

to imagine a response to the films that treats them as continuations of, rather than a radical break with, the woman's film of the classical period. While there are many other possible responses to the woman's film—which has also been received as a Camp phenomenon, especially in terms of the valuation of stars such as Davis and Crawford as Camp icons—one of these responses is sympathy, which forges communities of empathy and feeling. The woman's film in America is a continuation of the genre of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, exemplified by *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or, Life Among the Lowly*, the phenomenal 1852 global bestseller written by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

While some critics, such as James Baldwin in his scathing treatment of Stowe's novel, have read sentimentalism as oppressive, even pernicious, and at the very least deeply manipulative, there is also a period-specific way in which what sentimental texts ask us to do is to feel along with the characters and to share in their emotional histories.[17] This maneuver is key to what Jane Tompkins has called "sentimental power." [18] The woman's film, extending nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, creates communities bound together by shared feeling, crying along with the heroine and along with one another; the horror-woman's film, as I will show, creates such empathetic communities as well while also, sometimes mercilessly, holding up the sentimental genre to an unflattering but also not exhaustively unsympathetic scrutiny.

Indeed, the horror-woman's film provides something analogous to the Camp response, but not, I argue, reducible to it: a critical, ironic, deconstructive, and proto-feminist understanding of the woman's film as a crucial but incomplete stage in the representation of femininity. The woman's film at its most radical asks us to see femininity as being fully as complex, various, unclassifiable, vexed, and dynamic as masculinity. Analogously, the horror-woman's film asks us to consider the older version of the female star as being as fully complex and interesting as the more glamorous, more conventionally beautiful, younger versions of these stars. The '60s horror works also continue the woman's film's most politically urgent project, which is to interrogate institutionalized heterosexuality and compulsory marriage as equally oppressive structures for the containment of female sexuality and agency. Most of the horror-woman's films do not end in marriage or heterosexual fulfillment of any kind, and this maneuver is not a function exclusively of age. For example, in the Bette Davis vehicle *Dead Ringer* (1964), directed by Davis's *Now, Voyager* co-star Paul Henreid, the heroine is involved in a romantic relationship in her own life and then another one when she takes over the life of her rich twin sister, whom she murders. The film foregrounds the failure of sisterly bonds, while eschewing heterosexual romance as a cure-all for this failure. Most importantly of all, bonds between women (and their sundering) provide the central overlap between the classical and the horror-inflected woman's film.

In attempting to make a case for these films, I do not want to run the risk of eliding or ignoring the difficulties they present—a demonstrable ageism in that they treat the aging woman as spectacle; a capitulation to crass commercialism—but, at the same time, my goal is to take them seriously and to treat them with sympathy.

## Sisters and other strangers: *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*

One of the stalwart incarnations of the woman's film is the gothic melodrama (*Rebecca*,

Alfred Hitchcock, 1940; *Jane Eyre*, Robert Stevenson, 1943; *Gaslight*, George Cukor, 1944.) An offshoot of gothic melodrama is the uncanny tale, set in the present day, of twin sisters, usually played by the same actress (Olivia De Havilland in *The Dark Mirror*, Bette Davis in *A Stolen Life* and *Dead Ringer*), one of whom is good, the other evil; the evil one kills the good one and tries to assume her identity. *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* adds key aspects of the gothic—a dilapidated old house, an invalid in an upstairs bedroom, a villain whose madness intensifies into murderous rage—to the tale of uncanny sisters. Much like Hitchcock's *Psycho*, *Baby Jane* is horrific yet shot through with black comedy, thus establishing a certain critical distance from its genre trappings. Perhaps it is this distance that allows Aldrich's film to strive for a kind of realism, a strange authenticity, within the trappings of a mock-gothic. Black comedy self-consciously informs the film and qualifies its relationship to Camp, which depends on a lack of knowledge of its own effects on the part of the work. Black comedy works in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, *Baby Jane*'s structures of sympathetic feeling.

This story of two aging stars—former child star Baby Jane Hudson (Bette Davis), former movie star Blanche Hudson (Joan Crawford), now in a wheelchair—played by aging stars finds a core of reality in the gothic melodrama as it capitalizes on two important trends. First, *Psycho* established, with great controversy at the time, a new explicitness in horror movie violence through onscreen depictions of murder. While *Psycho*'s murder scene is all done with montage and music, and is not explicit in the torture-porn manner of *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), say, at the time its simulation/suggestion of its heroine's horrific stabbing in the shower was unprecedented.[19]

Second, the '60s horror movies with aging stars extended the meta-critique Hollywood had been inflicting upon itself since the 1950s: *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), *The Star* (Stuart Heisler, 1952, with Bette Davis in the lead), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincente Minnelli, 1952), *The Big Knife* (directed by Aldrich, 1955), *The Goddess* (John Cromwell, 1958). The '60s horror films only deepen a pre-existing sense of Gothicism in these meta-Hollywood films, exemplified by the burial of former silent movie star Norma Desmond's monkey at the start of *Sunset Boulevard*. (Moreover, the film begins with a shot of the protagonist, the screenwriter hired by Norma for her comeback, floating in a swimming pool after having been murdered by Norma; he narrates the film from the dead.)[20]

Aldrich discovers a new level of realism in the remains of the woman's film genre. Principally, this discovery lies in his depiction of class conflict and addiction. Coarse, ill-mannered Baby Jane's cold contempt for a pleasant but prim next-door neighbor; her ghoulishly out-of-place appearance in the bland, conformist world of suburban banks and supermarkets; and her almost incessant drinking take the woman's film to a new level of realism, in this manner following *Psycho*'s lead: horror lies not in outlandish settings and situations but in quotidian details and in the unspeakable isolation of the characters.

As I have argued elsewhere, the myth of Demeter and Persephone, in which the earth goddess mourns the abduction of her maiden goddess daughter by Hades, informs the depiction of mother-daughter relationships, usually fraught and marked by loss, especially on the part of the mother, in the woman's film.[21] The subgenre of the "uncanny sisters" film, in its depiction of the maternal "good" sister and the uncontrollable "evil" sister, is persephonal in that it allegorizes the fraught mother-daughter relationship in melodrama.

Usually, the evil sister goes rogue, taking narrative matters in her own hands and always threatening to abandon the good sister, who longs for some kind of reconciliation with her (or so it would seem). This is not in any way to diminish the specific importance of the sibling relationship.[22] I would argue, however, that the uncanny sisters tale follows the pattern of maternal melodramas insofar as it foregrounds a rift between deeply interconnected women, one of whom mourns the rift, the other of whom instigates it.[23]

*Baby Jane* uses an uncanny sisters-story and a ruined-Hollywood plot to explore female loss as well as rage. Baby Jane's loss most keenly informs the film—of her former child-star fame, her abortive movie career, her attractive youth—but Blanche also embodies loss, submitting to the overpowering Jane's will and sitting trapped in her wheelchair as images of her old movies play on the small screen. The aforementioned black-humor laughs pivot around the legendary feud between the stars. As has been well-known for decades, Davis and Crawford disliked one another; Davis was particularly vocal about her disdain for Crawford's manner (regal, pious, precious, and so forth), Crawford about Davis's ill-mannered behavior. Clearly, levels of competitiveness would appear to have shaped the stars' interactions over the decades. Aldrich derives some genuinely perverse zing out of pitting these competitive fading stars against one another.[24]

For all of the dark humor in the film, however, its levels of pain and the pathos are palpable. They emanate from the suffering of the socially cast-off characters as well as the real, genuine loss of the film's stars' own youth and marquee-power. I can think of no scene in 1960s film more heartbreaking than the shot of the aged, white-face-powder-plastered Jane staring at herself in the mirror with a shock of recognition at the disparity between her former child and haggard present-day older-woman self. The movie goes out of its way to make Davis-Jane hag-like. But the horror film genre does this—it takes personal fears and preoccupations to levels of extremity. The hideousness of Jane allegorizes the film's themes of loss and fears of loneliness.[25]

Davis made a conscious, theatrical decision to look as grotesque as possible—unkempt hair, ghoul-white face, saggy, ungainly housedresses. While some criticized her for her decision to appear in this extreme way, anyone familiar with the Davis *oeuvre* will recognize a sustained comfort level with such outré physical transformations with an emphasis on brazen ugliness. In *Marked Woman* (Lloyd Bacon, 1937), Davis's clip-joint “hostess” (read prostitute) Mary, avenging her younger sister's death and defying the mob-boss who killed her, is brutally beaten by the boss's henchman. Davis insisted on sporting realistic, grisly wounds, including the vengeful cross that is carved into her cheek. Davis's version of Elizabeth the Queen or the aged, post-diphtheria Mrs. Skeffington are sketches for Jane's strident, poignant ugliness, as is the initial, homely version of Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager*. Davis's insistence on physical ugliness as an expression of a character's loss and rage has many implications, but one of them is the performer's determined opposition to the Hollywood female beauty myth.

When Jane imprisons Blanche in her bedroom, tying her arms to an overhead notch, Blanche looks uncannily like a parody of the mother in the delivery room, in a suspended birth-giving scene. Deepening this metaphor, Jane cries out for Blanche at one point near the end of the film, desperately seeking her help; Blanche, starved, abused, near-death, can offer no maternal help to this deranged, pitiable daughter. Jane's treatment of Blanche parodies the mother's nurturing role; instead of offering food and solace, Jane gives Blanche hideously inedible food (her dead parakeet, a dead rat) and torments her

further with verbal and physical abuse. At the end of the film, set on a beach, Blanche lies dying as Jane reverts to a child-like role, girlishly spinning around. In a grim parody of a mother-daughter beach outing, Jane, her mind flooding with images of happier days of herself as the child star Baby Jane playing with her family at the beach, procures an ice cream cone for Blanche and herself.[26]

The black mammy or maid functions, as critics such as Mary Ann Doane and Molly Haskell point out, as a sign of the hyper-maternal in the woman's film.[27] The housekeeper Elvira, played by the African-American actress Maidie Norman, who cares for Blanche and whom Jane kills in a moment that was shocking during the film's initial run, suggests a motherly role savagely excised by the film. It's almost as if, in killing Elvira, Jane kills off her not only her own role as mother to Blanche but the function of mothering itself.

In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Barbara Creed argues that the primary fear at the core of the horror film genre is that the subject will be re-engulfed by the terrifying figure of the archaic mother, whose maw-like threat hovers around the cultural narratives—such as Freudian psychoanalysis and Hollywood film—that repress her presence; exemplary films in this regard include *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) and its sequels.[28]

I argue, however, that an equally urgent desire for *return* to the mother also informs the genre. Creed's exemplary archaic-mother-dread texts foreground a longing for return to origins as well as a dread of this return. Modern horror inherits longstanding anxieties over and conflictual wishes for return to the mother. Both the woman's film and modern horror, in its female-centered form, thematize mother-daughter bonds and a simultaneous desire for and dread of return to the mother. The mythic narrative of Demeter and Persephone, which intermeshes themes of maternal loss and rage (in her grief over her daughter Persephone's abduction, Demeter transforms the Earth into a bleak, endless winter), the daughter's journey away from the mother and also highly qualified return to her (Persephone can return to her mother and to the earth, but only for half of the year; during the other half, she lives with her husband Hades and with him rules over their hellish realm), and of the woman's violation at the hands of a brutal male figure (Hades' abduction and rape of Persephone and his entrapment of her through the pomegranate seed that forces her to return to him, a model for the grisly marriages in gothic melodrama in particular). In its weaving together of these proto-feminist themes, the Demeter-Persephone myth emerges as a resonant rubric—though, given the centrality of rape and violence, a volatile one as well—through which to understand reinterpret both female melodrama and female-centered horror.[29] Key examples of the longing to return to the mother along with the desire to escape or reject her include *Now, Voyager*, in which Bette Davis's Charlotte Vale maintains a relationship with a mother who is both deeply critical of her and intent on keeping her daughter by her side, and the two versions of *Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934; Douglas Sirk, 1959), in which the light-skinned daughter of the black woman rejects her mother but desperately mourns her death in the end.

*Mildred Pierce*, Michael Curtiz's great 1945 film (based on James M. Cain's 1941 novel), starring Joan Crawford in the title role and Ann Blyth as her manipulative daughter Veda, upends this pattern by obsessively detailing the mother's push-pull relationship to her daughter, with the emphasis decidedly on pull. The mother's incessant desire for



connection with her daughter emerges as an almost pathological force in the film (and much more so in Cain's novel, which hypnotically figures this relationship as incestuously charged). Mildred's reconciliation with her first husband Bert at the end, presented as a cathartic escape from her miasmic bond with Veda, alters the pattern of female melodrama, in which the daughter usually escapes the controlling mother while maintaining an ambivalent attitude toward marriage.

In *Baby Jane*, the inability of either woman to return to a past state of perfection, signified here by stardom, allegorizes the desperate longing for return to the mother and the impossibility of any such return, which will be thematized by later horror films as distinct as De Palma's *Carrie* and David Fincher's 1992 *Alien 3* (the scene in which the heroine Ripley performs an autopsy on the dead body of Newt, the little girl she saved in the previous film in the series). Somehow it seems harrowingly appropriate that both Bette Davis and Joan Crawford had daughters who wrote tell-all memoirs about the ways in which their mothers failed them; *Baby Jane* seems to locate a particular trauma in these stars' lives, allegorized by the plot of the film, as a simultaneous failure to mother and be mothered. Cast off by the studios that had made them great and which they helped to make successful, Davis and Crawford, in their careers, emerge as errant daughters never properly nurtured, albeit by the studio fathers who cast them off once their star power faded (Jack Warner, the head of Warner Brothers, where Davis was the premier female star from the later 1930s to the mid-1940s, and where Joan Crawford enjoyed a mid-career resurgence with *Mildred Pierce*, directed by Michael Curtiz, released in 1945; Louis B. Mayer, the head of MGM, who fired Crawford for being "box-office poison" at the end of the '30s).

*Baby Jane* indexes the major themes of the woman's film as it offers a deconstructive critique of it. In its fusion of woman's film themes (transformation, avenging women, a longing for return); its simultaneously pitiless and empathetic critique of its stars' careers and current status; and in its evocation of *Psycho*, Aldrich's film is a liminal work situated at the crossroads between genres, woman's film and horror, and between the studio system of Classic Hollywood and the new realism of the post-studio era leading into the New Hollywood of the 1970s.

## Mother-daughter *Psycho*: *Strait-Jacket*

If *Baby Jane* has failed to attract proper critical attention, William Castle's *Strait-Jacket* (1964) has been completely critically neglected.[30] This is a shame, because it is a significant work in the female-centered horror film genre, and proved to be the most influential of the "grand dame guignol" films.

Joan Crawford plays Lucy Harbin, a sexy, tough woman who recalls Bette Davis, with long raven-black hair, as Rosa Moline, a "twelve o'clock girl in a nine o'clock town" in the similarly undervalued *Beyond the Forest* (King Vidor, 1949). Lucy sports similar dramatic dark hair and baubles that hang from her ears and wrists. A Fury in a matter of minutes, Lucy savagely axe-murders her husband and the woman he's having an affair with in the opening section of the film. Castle then evokes Crawford's bravura performance as the mentally ill woman—driven to madness by her lover's rejection of her—in *Possessed*. [31] In lurid, grim shots of Crawford screaming in madness and despair, clad in the titular strait-jacket, *Strait-Jacket* suggests the incurability of

Crawford's character from the earlier film. *Strait-Jacket*'s premise is that, two decades later, Lucy is released from the sanatorium and goes back to live with her brother and his wife. Kindly folks, they have raised Lucy's now adult daughter, Carol (Diane Baker), who witnessed the hideous axe-murders when she was a child. Written by Robert Bloch, whose novel *Psycho* provided the source material for Hitchcock's film, *Strait-Jacket* plays out like a fusion of Hitchcock's *Psycho* and *Marnie* (1964), another film about a young woman traumatized by a primal scene of murder. *Strait-Jacket* differs from *Marnie* in making the traumatized mother, not the daughter, the protagonist and the center of sympathetic identification; indeed, the daughter, far from being the heroine, emerges as the villain.

*Strait-Jacket* features some of Crawford's most nuanced and realistic acting. The Camp response the film usually elicits emphasizes the scenes in which Crawford's Lucy dons her old flashy garb and tries to look like her old, good time-gal self again, complete with black wig, wild eyebrows, garishly provocative dress, enormous earrings, and noisy bracelets. (Again, the parallels with Bette Davis's Rosa Moline in *Beyond the Forest* are striking.) But in the quiet early scenes when Lucy, released from the hospital, makes her tentative way throughout her new home, Crawford's acting is naturalistically unshowy, and precise: deglamorised, her hair gray and in a bun, she looks like an ordinary, vulnerable older woman, which makes her embrace of her daughter all the more affecting. Throughout the film, Crawford oscillates between this touching fragility and a vibrant coarseness that is itself shot through with a genuine vulnerability.

One of the signal achievements of these horror-woman's films is their attentiveness to issues of class. What may be the true horror in *Strait-Jacket* is Lucy's discomfort as she sits, dressed in her flashy, tacky clothes, with her daughter's prospective in-laws in their deadly-bland middle-class parlor. Their stultifying normalcy contrasts sharply against both Lucy's past and her present state. In one of the most startling scenes of the film, Lucy rails against her daughter's would-be mother-in-law when she prods Lucy for details about her past. "I paid!" Crawford shrieks, in reference to the years she spent atoning for her crimes in the sanatorium. Crawford was always terrific in scenes in which she railed against class warfare. This scene recalls another righteous-anger Crawford moment in her fine melodrama *Sadie McKee* (Clarence Brown, 1934), in which her servant girl upbraids the lazy elites she works for because of their callous indifference to the plight of the working-class singer she loves.

*Strait-Jacket* continues and reimagines the trope of female transformation in the Crawford film.[32] Morphing from her sex-dynamo younger (and axe-wielding) self to her frail, vulnerable hair-in-a-bun old woman self back to a recreated version of that coarsely alive younger self (which when initially presented as such is still the older Crawford's attempt to appear to *be* that younger self; a younger actress was not cast in the Lucy role in the prologue), Crawford's Lucy indexes a range of possible female identities. In the particularly arresting moment in which, in her "young" Lucy garb, Lucy flirts provocatively with her daughter's stiff, handsome fiancé, Lucy and her daughter switch places, the daughter disciplining the mother who is acting like a teenage girl. (Bizarrely, just such a scenario would play out in real life, when Crawford filled in for her daughter Christina, unbeknownst to her, on the television soap opera *The Secret Storm*, the aged Crawford playing her daughter's ingénue role in a 1968 episode.)

At the climax of the film, Lucy, an aggrieved Demeter in pursuit of her daughter, goes

back to Hell: that stifling middle-class house of her daughter's potential in-laws. What she discovers is the murderer whose rampage has been so intimately connected to her own trauma and capacity for violence: her own daughter Carol, dressed up as Lucy, wearing a mask of her own mother's face. As the two struggle, Lucy preventing Carol from killing again, Lucy unmasking her daughter. In Carol's version of the female masquerade, she impersonates her mother not as her current, older self but as the younger and violent Lucy who committed murders before the young Carol's eyes. When Carol's fiancé appears, Lucy sorrowfully raises the mask of her own face to him, as if this gesture could explain everything.

Beneath its exploitation-horror trappings is an exquisite study in the construction of femininity in a misogynistic culture. Freud and feminist psychoanalysis have both argued that women in culture have been able to derive some social satisfaction and wield phallic power through narcissism. Carol's madness has its foundation in an obsessive narcissistic fascination with her mother. Moreover, the film's interesting depiction of Carol as a sculptor (recalling female artists in Hawthorne's 1860 novel *The Marble Faun*, another work obsessed with female sexual guilt and potential for violence) implicitly suggests that her obsessive mirroring of her mother stems from her awareness of the iconic nature of femininity in a culture dominated by the female beauty myth. Her need to inhabit a younger, sexually dynamic version of her mother suggests a fixation with her mother's sexuality and vitality. By inhabiting her own fantasy of her mother's narcissistic, gaudy sexual theatricality as well as her vengeful wrath, Lucy can simultaneously restore the lost mother and displace her, seizing her parent's power for herself.

The film allegorizes, perhaps, the young "modern" actress's feelings of rivalry with and potential inadequacy in the face of the great female stars of the classical Hollywood past. While the focus in critical analyses of these films is on the grasping, desperate nature of the aging female star clinging to any available vehicle, even one in which she will be made to look "wildly repulsive," *Strait-Jacket* foregrounds the threatening appeal of the older female star, who galvanizes the rivalrous desires of the younger. In this manner, *Strait-Jacket* provides a more outwardly lurid but also resonant reflection on the themes that affectingly inform Joseph L. Mankiewicz's great 1950 film *All About Eve*, in which Bette Davis's theater star Margo Channing is preyed upon by the younger Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter), an aspiring actress who craves Margo's fame, skill, and life.

Joan Riviere's argument in her influential 1929 essay "Woman and the Masquerade" intersects with *Strait-Jacket*. A British psychoanalyst who was Freud's earliest translator into English, Riviere argued that being female is an act of mimicry, a sustained masquerade. Women must impersonate femaleness within a culture that constructs femininity as a series of masks, and this act of impersonation causes considerable pain for the woman.[34] In *Strait-Jacket*, the daughter wears not only the mother's face but also the painted, artificial face women must don in culture in order to have even the most partial of their needs met. The daughter inherits the mother's own sexually and socially abnegated position, growing into an extrusion of the mother's gendered mask. That this is an entirely arbitrary fate yet *seems* inevitable reveals a great deal, far too much, about the ways in which culture organizes gendered and sexual development and identity.

Handing her own face-mask to Carol's bewildered, obtuse fiancé and walking away, Lucy appears to be handing him the history of constructions of femininity, a history she has unmasked. As Lucy grabs the mask and tears at it, she alternately sobs piteously and

angrily fulminates: “I love her, I hate her”: her incommensurate emotions are the logical result of the brutal, haphazard socialization of woman, at least in a pre-feminist age, made simultaneously to reject their mothers and feel lifelong enmity towards them while identifying and transforming into them.

What is ultimately most fascinating about *Strait-Jacket* is its thorough up-ending of perhaps the central preoccupation in the woman’s film, the heroine’s marriage, a project into which her mother is intimately incorporated, as both overseer and rival, supporter and usurper. Here, the mother, usually in the supporting role, watching from the sidelines, is the main character, and the daughter’s relationship to the mother far outdistances her relationship to romance and her own imminent marriage. In addition to the mother-daughter relationship, the female horror films of the 1960s are linked to the woman’s film genre through a centrally maintained ambivalence towards heterosexual relations, which take the forms of masculinity (figured in *Baby Jane* by the hapless and corrupt image of Victor Buono as Jane’s would-be piano-accompanist, here by the absence of any possible mate for Lucy Harbin), and marriage.

What Carolyn Heilbrun called the female romance plot—as opposed to the male quest plot—drives the genre of the woman’s film.[35] The pervasive, urgent presence of the romance plot raises the central question: will the singular, intelligent, lively heroine marry? And if she does marry, how will marriage affect her? These are not casually posed questions, since the heroine’s very personhood is shown to be at stake. In film after film, the choice is between a woman’s loyalty to her own distinctiveness—living a “life of single blessedness,” as Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) describes it in *Now, Voyager*—and to the marriage plot, as I rephrase Heilbrun’s paradigm.

*Strait-Jacket* resolves the marriage plot by having Carol comfortably enter into it, an attractive and eminently “marriageable” young woman who seems to be marrying up. It is the coarse and self-conscious Lucy falling apart and railing against propriety in the middle-class setting that is a much bigger obstacle for the young heroine. The biggest obstacle of all to the successful resolution of the marriage plot is Carol’s ongoing narcissistic parody of and preoccupation with her galvanizingly sexual but also unclassifiable mother. In his book *The Moment of Psycho*, David Thomson suggests that a much more resonant turn for the film’s second half would have been to have the murdered Marion Crane (Janet Leigh’s) mother search for her missing daughter, and therefore have Marion’s mother—as opposed to her sister, Lila Crane (Vera Miles), in the film—confront “Mrs. Bates,” the shadowy mother of the psychotic Norman Bates, who turns out to be a long-dead woman whose body has been preserved by her “psycho” son. *Strait-Jacket* is both William Castle’s and Robert Bloch’s version of such a scenario, in which the mother is not dead, but alive, altogether too much so for the narrative’s efforts to contain her.

## Silencing of Bette Davis

*Hush...Hush, Sweet Charlotte*, Robert Aldrich’s 1964 follow-up to *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, is as fascinating a work in its own right as its more famous predecessor.[36] With a story and a co-written screenplay by Henry Farrell, who wrote the novel on which *Baby Jane* was based, *Hush...Hush* was supposed to reteam archrivals Davis and Crawford, but—for reasons officially connected to Crawford’s sudden illness—

she was replaced by Olivia de Havilland. While it would have been sublime to see Davis and Crawford reteamed, especially in a reversal of their power roles in the previous work, the latter is unthinkable without the cool, brittle menace de Havilland brings to it.[37]

Davis stars as the aged Charlotte Hollis, a former Southern belle who lives as a recluse in her father's sprawling mansion, attended only by the slovenly, witchlike housekeeper Velma Carruther (Agnes Moorehead, a gay icon in her own right). Thirty-seven years earlier, her married lover John Mayhew (Bruce Dern) was axe-murdered by someone whose real identity will not be revealed until late in the film (his wife Jewell Mayhew, played by Mary Astor). Beheaded and mutilated, his hand chopped off, John continues to haunt the moody, at times hysterical Charlotte. Her emotional turbulence stems from having had to endure being falsely accused all of these years of killing John.

At the start of the narrative proper, Charlotte is being threatened off of her property by "the damned county commissioner." She asks her enigmatic, Northern cousin Miriam (de Havilland), who once lived with Charlotte's family but is now a "career" woman who works in public relations, to come and help her. Unbeknownst to increasingly agitated Charlotte, Miriam, far from helping her cousin out, is actually in cahoots with the courtly Southern doctor and Hollis family friend, Drew (Joseph Cotten), who broke off his engagement to Miriam when the murder-scandal broke. When Velma discovers and threatens to expose Miriam and Drew's perfidy, Miriam kills her. Keeping Charlotte nearly comatose on pills, Miriam and Drew also proceed to stage elaborate set-pieces designed to terrify her into madness. In the culminating moment of their elaborate ruse, Drew masquerades as the dead, dismembered John before the distraught and apparently helpless Charlotte. Having shot the apparition, Charlotte discovers the "murdered" Drew instead (Drew pretends that Charlotte has killed him). Miriam, keeping her involvement in the plot to drive Charlotte mad hidden, helps her hysterical cousin to bury Drew in the river. When Drew, grotesque and oozy, seemingly returns from the grave, Charlotte sinks into a terrified insanity from which there is no return. Charlotte, however, has not been rendered entirely helpless. She discovers Miriam and Drew's nefarious scheme and, hurling an immense potted vase from a high balcony on the lovers, kills Miriam and Drew as they dance, almost literally, on her grave.

In the florid theatricality of these climactic sections, the film exudes a meta-critical awareness of its Grand Guignol underpinnings. Baroque though it is, *Hush...Hush* is a significant film for its intertextual relationship to the woman's film and its role as a precursor to modern horror. It plays like a pastiche-remake of Davis's great 1938 Southern melodrama *Jezebel*, directed by William Wyler. In its evocation of Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, it continues a tradition of American gothic that reached a cinematic explosion in the Roger Corman-produced horror films of the 1960s. Moreover, it engages with the Southern queer-feminist gothic-lyrical style and themes of Tennessee Williams plays as well as of his recurring theme of the aging-woman-protagonist.

The casting of Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois in Elia Kazan's 1951 film version of Williams' most famous play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, recalls her famous performance in *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), deepening the associations with Southern femininity.[38] Williams' novel *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* and its 1961 Jose Quintero film adaptation, which also stars Leigh, further develop the theme of the aging-woman protagonist, but this time in a manner that approaches the horror genre.

Quintero's film plays out very much like a horror movie, as Leigh's aging-actress-finding-love-with-a-younger-man-in-Rome is periodically stalked by an enigmatic young man who appears to represent the Ghost of Evil Cruising. His final appearance at the climax, which the film suggests will be Leigh's final living moment, is pure horror cinema.

Perhaps most resonantly of all, *Hush...Hush* both evokes and extends the plot, themes, and the film adaptation of Williams' play *Suddenly, Last Summer*. Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the 1959 film version of this play has been most famously treated in queer circles by Vito Russo in *The Celluloid Closet*, as well as by D.A. Miller and Parker Tyler, all of whom read the film as homophobic.[39] *Summer's* thematization of a woman's memory as damaging and dangerous both to her and to the structures of power—institutional psychiatry and the family, in this case—corresponds to important aspects of *Hush...Hush*.

For Russo, the film version of *Summer* creates significant new iconographies of homophobia, as the poet Sebastian Venable, whose face we never see, is devoured by the young men the homosexual poet preyed upon, the slum children-turned-cannibals of the exotic beach town of "Cabeza de Lobo." The film version prominently features, as the poet's mother, Katharine Hepburn in a rare villainous role that presages the grande dame-guignol turns of other classic-Hollywood stars in the 1960s. (Hepburn would otherwise eschew all such roles, which is a significant dimension of the distinctiveness of her class as well as star persona.)

Both *Suddenly* and *Hush...Hush* foreground what Michel Foucault described as "the hystericization of woman": the ways in which institutional psychiatry and other cultural centers of power render the dangerously outspoken or otherwise intransigent woman "mad" or "ill," allowing patriarchal-state-familial control over her mind and body.[40] In order not to be lobotomized, Sebastian's cousin Catharine (Elizabeth Taylor), who witnessed his gruesome cannibalistic murder, must fight against the formidable Violet Venable and the psychiatric institution in which she has been more or less imprisoned.[41]

In *Hush...Hush*, Charlotte Hollis—eccentric and erratic though she is—is someone who feigns the madness with which she is associated by all in her community. Like an aged female Hamlet, Charlotte uses this put-on madness for her own ends, to investigate the crime (even if unwittingly) that has made her a lonely pariah. As Miriam and Drew plot to turn her into a genuine madwoman who must be institutionalized—odd whiffs of the *Jane Eyre* plot, only here Jane Eyre is the evil one, Mrs. Rochester, the infamous madwoman in the attic, the heroine—Charlotte must circumvent not only their plot but her own growing potential madness.

It is instructive to take another opportunity to compare the narratives of the classical woman's film and its late-stage, horror form. If we recall the plot of *Jezebel*, Davis plays the headstrong, mercurial Southern belle Julie Marsden. When she announces to her worried aunt (Fay Bainter) that she plans to wear red to the Olympus Ball—a major social event for unmarried young ladies and their beaus—she reassures her with the saucy proclamation, "This is 1852, dumplin', 1852, not the Dark Ages!" Julie's red dress, which turns the Olympus Ball into her greatest disaster, symbolizes female intransigence, passion, and sorrow at once. Her fiancé, "Pres" (Henry Fonda), forces Julie to dance with him in her red dress, even as tidal waves of attendees recede in horror from the tensely

swirling couple.[42]

What '60s female-centered horror does with the brooding tensions of the woman's film is to literalize them. The anxieties over female sexuality that simmer beneath the surface of *Jezebel*—clearly figured in Pres' discomfort with Julie's "scarlet woman" carnality, but also in Julie's own retreat from it, evinced by her increasingly desperate pleas that he take her off the dance floor—become a literal, material part of *Hush*...*Hush*'s palette.

At the lavish party (shades of the Olympus Ball) in the film's prologue, the black orchestra stops playing music as it becomes gradually apparent that something is terribly wrong. (Like *Jezebel*, *Hush*...*Hush* is set in Louisiana; as I will discuss below, its depictions of blacks are charged with the significance of the civil-rights era.) The cries of Charlotte, in a sumptuous white dress, cause a commotion, and her father advances towards her, parting the waters of stunned, apprehensive revelers. Backing away from the crime scene in which her beloved John lies murdered, decapitated and with his hand cut off, the young Charlotte—played here, though in careful *chiaroscuro*, by Davis—turns before her father (Victor Buono once again). As her father, who bribed John into breaking off his attachment to Charlotte, keeps asking her to come with him, Charlotte repeats, "I don't want to, Poppa. No, Poppa." The white gown that she wears unmistakably evokes the one that Davis wore in *Jezebel* in the scene in which she begs Pres for forgiveness. But this time, a huge, dripping blotch of blood mars its hygienic whiteness.

This is the murdered John's literal blood. It is also the metaphorical blood of female suffering and female wrath at once. As we learn later, it was John's wronged wife Jewell Mayhew (played as an older woman by Mary Astor) who killed John so savagely. Miriam, in an extremely long-brewing plot, has proceeded to blackmail Jewell for years.

The attention that the film pays to Jewell Mayhew, shown to be a bitter but also interestingly rueful character, is significant, in my view. It speaks to the film's interest in women's experiences and the force of their character even when old and vulnerable. There are odd whiffs of Lady Macbeth and her ineradicable bloodstains in the portrayal of Jewell Mayhew. Lady Macbeth wrings her bloody hands as she descends into the madness that succeeds her murder-lust; is John's cut-off hand a subtle nod to this famous Shakespearean image? The maddened wife now cuts off her husband's hand as she bloodies her own.

Charlotte's spreading bloodstain symbolizes the blame she will be forced to bear for a murder she did not commit. It is also the mark of her sexual shame for an adulterous affair the memory of which she passionately clings to decades later. And it is the mythic virginal blood of the newly married woman, except here Charlotte—much like Julie Marsden—cannot, will not be married.

This is, therefore, extraordinarily symbolic blood, blood that signifies Charlotte's failed erotic, emotional, and, possibly, marital hopes and that stains the lives of the other characters as well. The shame that Julie Marsden's brazenly worn red dress brings down on her now spreads over and consumes Charlotte, who becomes a humiliated and sullied recluse, forever leered and gawked at as mistress, murderess, and madwoman.

The film articulates the powerful theme of the woman's refusal to acquiesce to the demands of patriarchy, which insists on constructing women as submissive to men's will. Again, we recall her father's insistent requests that Julie come to him, and Charlotte



backing away from him as she repeats, “No, Poppa. I don’t want to, Poppa. *No*, Poppa...” While Tony Williams reads Charlotte as an oedipal daughter locked in the paternal embrace, I would argue that the film foregrounds her ambivalence over this relationship. Her powerful, manipulative father’s presence in the film signifies decades of patriarchal corruption and control.[43] In this manner, the film recalls, as well, the great William Wyler film adaptation of Lillian Hellman’s play *The Little Foxes* (1941), which also starred Davis, a stinging critique of the American South’s corruption and greed during the Reconstruction era.

Indeed, what stems from this paternal ambivalence is a larger heterosexual ambivalence. While Charlotte clutches the music box that John gave her and that plays the cloying title song on the harpsichord that her lover wrote for her—implying, then, that John often made the young Charlotte cry, long before he breaks up with her at her brute father’s behest—her passion for John is treated in the film as a vestige of a poisoned past and as the goad to her incipient madness. In other words, heterosexual passion is this aging woman warrior’s Achilles heel.

Miriam, musing on why Velma Carruther hates her so, remarks that Velma has always been obsessively devoted to Charlotte; the implication is of a lesbian tie, at least on Velma’s part. This tension in the film is intensified, for contemporary viewers, by the gay adulation of Agnes Moorehead as a camp/lesbian star, stemming no doubt from her role on the popular 1960s sitcom *Bewitched* as well as her appearance on *The Twilight Zone* series entry, “The Invaders.”[44]

De Havilland’s Miriam evokes her Catherine Sloper in *The Heiress*, a great 1948 film adaptation, directed by William Wyler, of Henry James’ novel *Washington Square*. The young, shy, awkward Catherine is emotionally annihilated by men—first, by the handsome young mercenary Morris Townsend, who woos her for her money and then abandons her when she seems to have been disinherited by her father, who disapproves of the match; second, by her father, who correctly senses that Morris only wants Catherine for her money, and tells her so in the most cruelly explicit manner possible. Catherine, as I argue in *Representations of Femininity*, is then reborn as a Fury whose goal is to seek vengeance on the men who have wronged her.

Miriam’s style—speech and deportment and dress—for much of the film is refined, precise, personable, and increasingly icy. She is presented as a woman who was wronged by a man in her youth—Drew, who dumped her—and never developed a relationship with any other man. Indeed, her rekindled romance with Drew—played by an aged Joseph Cotton as a would-be Lothario—more resonantly evokes her vengeful greed and desire to destroy Poppa Hollis’s wealth and estate along with his once prized and pampered daughter than it does her erotic passion for Drew.

Miriam and Drew are presented, in Raymond Bellour’s phrase to describe Sam and Lila Crane in *Psycho*, as the shadow couple, a reconstitution of the normative heterosexual couple, its shadow.[45] But Miriam and Drew are the only sustained representation of heterosexual relationships in the film, given that John exists, for the most part, only in Charlotte’s memory. They are the fabric and the texture of the structures of power that surround and then engulf Charlotte—structures of power shown to be entirely negative and constrictive, devoid of empathy and imagination, and utterly corrupt.



Miriam and Drew, despite their depravity, access and embody the power of heterosexual normativity, and this is a power that cannot be underestimated. Charlotte, the hystericized woman—drugged and seemingly demented to the point of no return—spies on their decadent, heartless, perverse merriment at the climax. As Charlotte watches from above on her balcony (she is an aged Juliet with a murdered Romeo), Miriam and Drew dance in triumph, reveling in Charlotte’s humiliation and imminent institutionalization in a psychiatric ward.

The film frames its fragile but indomitable heroine in direct opposition to the villainous couple’s triumphant union. A lonely, bedraggled, truly mad woman about to be shipped off to the sanitarium, powerless, socially shunned, abject, Charlotte would appear to have nothing left—a Charlotte *Vale* who was never saved, who could never find redemptive escape.

That is what makes Charlotte’s final act so satisfying—and interpretable as an act of queer intransigence. In destroying this corrupt couple, she scores points for all of the vulnerable and abject in the social order who have been trampled by the decadent yet unimpeded forces of greed and corruption who hide behind normativity’s face. She also avenges the murdered Velma, her lifelong female companion.

Charlotte, leaving her mansion the next day, presumably to be tried, institutionalized, or both, must once again face the crowd of unsympathetic gawkers who glut themselves on her suffering. Charlotte, now looking stunningly elegant and poised, is about to walk out of the father’s house, yet still clutches fast to the music box. In what is, in my view, one of the most feminist gestures in films of the 1960s, Charlotte stops in her tracks and *puts the music box down*. She no longer needs or wants it. The entire *raison d’être* of the film has been the culmination of this moment in which Charlotte implicitly rejects the trappings of the heterosexual sexual order. *I don’t want to, Poppa*, has become, after decades of despair, a rejection of and break from both the father *and* sexual normativity, embodied by the specter of the dead and maddening John, who even in life silenced Charlotte, as the imperative command in the title song (*Hush...Hush*) song suggests.

Like *Baby Jane* but also many of the horror-woman’s films, *Hush...Hush* exquisitely thematizes what Helena Michie has called “sororophobia,” a disruption in bonds between women.[46] Fatal gulfs on the level of class and affect keep the women characters from bonding: Miriam and Charlotte, primarily, but also Miriam and Velma, Miriam and Jewell, Jewell and Charlotte (couldn’t both women be imagined to have put aside their differences and compared notes on the frustrating John they shared?), even, at times, Charlotte and Velma (“I told you to stay *out*!” Charlotte shrieks at Velma at one point).

The terrifying nighttime scene in which Miriam slaps the near-catatonic Charlotte after they have apparently buried Drew in the river—the way de Havilland and Davis play the scene, the former with a venomous cold hatred, the latter with the abject terror of a small child—is an exquisite and heartrending depiction of sorophobia. The force of Miriam’s rage exceeds her ruse; it seems to flow from the depths of longstanding pain and anger. (Again, such a moment allegorizes behind-the-scenes Hollywood tensions, such as a possible rivalry between an important female star such as de Havilland and the more famous female star Davis.)

I would argue that these fatal rifts between women is the chief trauma at the heart of the

horror-woman's film—a lack of connection and empathy, a lack of mutual and healing affirmation and strength. If in the classical woman's film the plot centered on the woman's relationship to marriage, in these films the plot centers on a woman's relationship to other women, often to her nearest and dearest and least accessible. What is moving about *Strait-Jacket* is that Crawford's Lucy Harbin vows, in the last moments, to provide comfort and support to the daughter who attempted to destroy her anew. In contrast, films such as *Hush...Hush* and *Dead Ringer* (1964) hinges upon one sister's literal destruction of another.[47]

*Hush...Hush* subtly suggests that Charlotte's social abjection places her on a social level with the African-American women of "1964" Louisiana. In one unforced but telling scene, a group of black women hired by Miriam, getting the house packed up before Charlotte's eviction, stare at Charlotte as she walks by them. "Stop *staring*," she requests, having been pulverized by the assaultive gaze for so long. (In one startling scene, Charlotte is blinded by a tabloid reporter's incessant camera-flashes.)

Interestingly enough, Aldrich gives us a scene that occurs solely among the black women. One woman remarks that Charlotte certainly *seems* as crazy as people say she is. "That's what people say," another of the women responds. "But I wouldn't bet on it." This woman's surprising solidarity, to whatever extent it exists, with Charlotte, the madwoman who isn't really mad, or is only as mad as society has made her, is a grace note of sympathy that cuts across class and racial lines. It also forges a link between the wealthy but fading former Southern belle Charlotte and the black underclass upon whose misfortunes her father's wealth was built.

Another interesting character who provides a note of sympathy is the English reporter, Harry, played by the elderly Cecil Kellaway. Taking a position of skepticism towards Charlotte's guilt that places him in marked contrast to her contemptuous community, he quietly investigates the case, having tea with the elderly, dying Jewell Mayhew, played with melancholy world-weariness by Astor, who, in an Oscar-winning role, had co-starred with Bette Davis in the crypto-lesbian melodrama *The Great Lie* (Edmund Goulding, 1941).

As Jewell and Harry talk, she says something rather out of the blue to him, along the lines of: "I imagine that you've had your fair share of unhappiness." Where does this line come from, and what is its significance? Is it possible that Jewell reads Harry as a gay man—and someone presumably as lonely as she? Notably, there is no suggestion whatsoever of anything even slightly erotic in Harry's scenes with either Jewell or Charlotte. In other words, he is never presented as the dapper geriatric gentleman who may swoop one of these women off their feet.

In one of the most appealing scenes in the film, Charlotte and Harry speak for the first time. Charlotte visibly relaxes as she shows this non-judgmental, genial stranger around the house. She is really beginning to let down her guard when she spies one of the black women holding John's music box, about to pack it up. Truly seeming like a madwoman, Charlotte, in mid-sentence during her conversation with Harry, shrieks at her and wrenches the box out of the packing-woman's hands. These are the hands of the same woman who had spoken out on behalf of Charlotte's sanity. Connection—with this sympathetic woman of another race and with the elderly, possibly gay Englishman—is shattered.

This scene makes the final one between Charlotte and Harry all the more poignantly satisfying. In the limousine in which she rides to her ambiguous fate, Charlotte looks up and sees Harry, one sympathetic and knowing face among the crowd of ravenously mean-spirited gawkers, reveling once again in her misery and monstrosity. Harry hands a note to Charlotte: it is Jewell's confession, after all of these years. This gesture is significant. It evokes Charlotte's friendship with Harry and at the same time a reconciliation—of a kind—with Jewell, with whom she shared the love for and the body of a weak-willed man.

*Hush...Hush* establishes bonds even as it destroys them. It establishes heroism in the face of defeat. What makes it a queer work is its emphasis on non-biological and non-marital kinship, on the power and importance of friendship and ties outside of the family. In the process, it ennobles the socially abject—the mad, the slovenly, the non-white, and the other outsiders.

I believe that careful examination of at least some of these horror- woman's films will reveal further, resistant elements in them. At the very least, they deserve more scrutiny. More work also needs to be done on the relationship between the Camp and the feminist potentialities within them, and the ways in which these differing approaches intersect, often in ways that have not yet been sufficiently considered. In any event, I believe that 1960s horror-woman's films are also resonant indications of the potentialities of the woman's film genre—signs of the genre's enduring life and vitality.

## Notes

1. See Thomson, *The Moment of Psycho: How Alfred Hitchcock Taught America to Love Murder*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Kolker refers to Arthur Penn's 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde* as having "opened the bloodgates." See Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness (4th Edition): Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49.
2. See Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne, *The Guide to United States Popular Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001), 410.
3. These horror-woman's films starred, among others, Bette Davis (*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, *Hush*, *Hush Sweet Charlotte*, *Dead Ringers*, *The Nanny*, *The Anniversary*), Joan Crawford (*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*, *Strait-Jacket*, *Berserk*, *Trog*), Olivia De Havilland (*Lady in a Cage*, *Hush*, *Hush*), Joan Fontaine (*The Devil's Own*), Barbara Stanwyck (*The Night Walker*) Tallulah Bankhead (*Die, Die, My Darling*), Shelley Winters (*Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?*, *What's the Matter with Helen?*), Agnes Moorehead (*Dear, Dead Delilah*).
4. Reams of analysis on the careers of Davis and Crawford and their specific star identities (and of those of the other female stars who made horror films in the 1960s) have been and will continue to be written. Valuable discussions of the queer significance of Davis's star presence include Martin Shingler, "Masquerade or Drag? *Bette Davis* and the *Ambiguities* of Gender," *Screen* 36, no. 3 (1995); Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). On Crawford, see Pamela Robertson, "Camping Under Western Stars: Joan Crawford in Johnny Guitar," in her study *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae*

*West to Madonna* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 85-115; Robert J. Corber, "Joan Crawford's Padded Shoulders," *Cold War Femme* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011), 97-126.

5. See, for example, *Sex and the City*, Season 2, episode 18, "Ex and the City," in which the four protagonists Carrie Bradshaw, Miranda Hobbes, Charlotte York, and Samantha Jones re-enact the "Your girl is lovely, Hubble" climax from *The Way We Were* in which Barbra Streisand bids Robert Redford and his new wife goodbye, renouncing her claim on Redford at last. Actually, the freewheeling sexual adventurer Samantha (Kim Cattrall) claims to be completely ignorant of the Streisand film, and when asked why—how could she *not* know of it—Sam tartly replies, "Chick-flick." An entire discourse encapsulated in one moment, or series of discourses—the transition from the classic to the post-modern woman's film, the break with the idealization of the classical Hollywood past on the part of postfeminist women and also postqueer gay men, the anti-relationship Sam Jones being the embodiment of both.

6. Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930–1960* (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 20.

7. Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1989), 135-170; quote on p. 135. Steven C. Earley would appear to confirm Davis's sense, noting that by the end of the 1940s, "the public had tired of the woman's picture. These women and their soap opera problems had no place in the world of postwar realism." See Earley, *An Introduction to American Movies* (New York: New American Library, 1978), 64. Earley ignores the wide range of 1950s woman's films, especially those made by Douglas Sirk. As Sirk's brilliantly icy example shows, however, the genre had already entered into a deconstructive mode. For discussions of these and other films in the '50s, see Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and the reader edited by Christine Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: BFI Pub., 1987.

8. In *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (New York: Princeton UP, 1985), Ray reads certain key works such as *Casablanca* as "concealed Westerns." Along these lines, I argue that female-centered modern horror works can be interpreted as concealed woman's films.

9. For a sustained discussion along these lines, see Lucy Fischer, *Cinematernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). I would argue that *Wait Until Dark* (Terence Young, 1967), adapted from the hit play by Frederick Knott, is a much more subversive film than *Rosemary's Baby*. Starring Audrey Hepburn as Susy Hendrix, a resourceful blind woman contending against a band of criminals led by the psychotic Mr. Roat (Alan Arkin), the film concludes in a stunning showdown between the vulnerable heroine and Roat in which she uses her vulnerability to her advantage to outwit and defeat him (and mainly simply to survive). Though popular in its day and featuring Audrey Hepburn's last significant performance, this important film has been almost completely critically overlooked.

10. David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 297, emphasis in the original.

11. See Lauren Gail Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), which includes a chapter on the Bette Davis woman's film *Now, Voyager* (1942) and its source, Olive Higgins Prouty's novel.
12. See chapter seven of Phelan's *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Like the other chapters of this provocative and moving work, this discussion of the film is "staged" as a performance piece between a therapist and her analysand; *Baby Jane* becomes an extraordinary economy of emotional and gendered exchange between these two figures, a myth of femininity, female desire, and self-abnegation.
13. Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974; rev. ed., Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987), 328.
14. Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 15–34. Quoted passage is from p. 21.
15. Vivian Sobchack, "Scary Women," *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).41-42. I also believe that some of the other works that Sobchack discusses here, such as Roger Corman's *The Wasp Woman* (1959), have more complexity than Sobchack allows them in her provocative but also quite traditional reading of these films.
16. Not all of the horror-woman's films are resistant works, by any means. While there may be something of interest in a film such as *The Nanny* (Seth Holt, 1965) that casts Davis as a neurotic British woman who looks after children and comes close to murdering them (and indeed did murder a child once), I find no value in films such as *The Anniversary* (Roy Ward Baker, 1968),starring Davis, or *Berserk* (Jim O'Connolly, 1967) and *Trog* (Freddie Francis, 1970), starring Crawford, for example. Nevertheless, careful analysis of the best works in the horror-woman's film cycle yields evidence of their efforts to resist the structures of power that would keep, without the films' intervention, the genre's stars forever out of view.
17. James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949), collected in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998).
18. Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). I disagree with many of Tompkins' claims—she diminishes the violence and potential for disturbance in sentimental fiction—but her essential point about sentimental fiction's establishment of communities of shared feeling is valuable.
19. "Time Magazine's reviewer characterized the shower murder as 'one of the messiest, most nauseating murders ever,'" notes Robert E. Kapsis in his *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 62. Kapsis provides a detailed analysis of the initial condemnatory response to *Psycho's* violence and gore.
20. For Andrew Ross, the opening scenes of *Baby Jane*—after the long pre-credits sequence which moves from the depiction of the sisters as children during the "Baby

Jane” craze, establishing their longstanding rivalry, to the scenes of movie producer screenings in which Hollywood moguls deride Jane’s talents as an actress (using footage from Bette Davis’s own lesser-known films from the ‘30s)—are crucial, depicting the fomentation of the older Jane’s rage against wheelchair-bound Blanche as the result of screenings of the more successful actress Blanche’s old movies and their nostalgic power over viewers. “The late fifties and early sixties saw the recirculation of classic Hollywood films on television, giving rise to a wave of revivalist nostalgia, and supplementing the cult of Hollywoodiana, with all of the necrophiliac trappings that embellish its initiates ‘sick’ fascination with the link between glamor and death.” Ross, “Uses of Camp,” 137-8.

21. In *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*, I argue that mother-daughter relationships and female transformation are central to the woman’s film, both of which concerns evoke the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Key texts in the woman’s film genre, principally *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) and *Imitation of Life* (in both the John Cromwell 1934 and the Douglas Sirk 1959 versions), simultaneously thematize the woman’s relationship to marriage and men and a central conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. The phenomenon of female transformation usually occurs on a physical level—Bette Davis’s metamorphosis from ugly duckling to beautiful, nervous swan in *Now, Voyager* the prime example—but also signals other kinds as well, such as an emotional one. Sometimes the transformation the woman seeks and eventually undergoes happens on a more abstract level, such as that of class, as evinced by numerous Hollywood films in which social-climbing women transform their socioeconomic status, exemplified by *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945). Generally speaking, however, I argue that female transformation is an allegorical thematization of the major themes of the woman’s film: marriageability, marriage, mother-daughter bonds, and the woman’s ambivalent relationship to all of these.

22. As Juliet Mitchell has notably demonstrated, one of the chief limitations of Freud’s oedipal theory is his overlooking of sibling relationships. See Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (New York: Polity, 2004).

23. Modern horror makes the *mater*-metaphor in sisterly horror explicit. A reworking of *Psycho* and *Rear Window* both, Brian De Palma’s great 1973 film *Sisters*—about two Siamese twins, both superbly played by Margot Kidder, one of whom is a charming model and actress, the other homicidally deranged—is a prime example. In one shot, the “good” twin, Dominique, lies ready and waiting for the would-be leading man Philip (in an interesting and pointed casting choice, played by an African-American actor) to ravish her; as Philip lifts up her nightgown, to the rising fright-chords of Bernard Herrmann’s score, we see the long, thick mid-torso scar of the incision where her twin was severed from her body. The way this scar has been made to look recalls the womb or the vagina, and signals, in this film obsessed with family ties, a mother’s loss of her child as well as the severing of Siamese-siblings.

24. For an exhaustive account of this topic, see Shaun Considine, *Bette and Joan: The Divine Feud* (New York: Dutton, 1989).

25. In this regard, Jane recalls the Hepzibah Pyncheon, a kind woman whose permanent scowl is a mark of her isolation from the world, in Hawthorne’s gothic novel *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).

26. The scene of Davis/Jane surrounded by bewildered teenagers as she cavorts madly on the beach is crucial, in Andrew Ross's reading, to its Camp status, in that Jane is completely alien to them and bears none of her former meanings, her status as child star, to say nothing of her mediocre acting career as an adult, and whatever significance it had completely unavailable to the onlookers. "The camp effect, then, is created not simply by a change in the mode of cultural production, but rather when the products (stars, in this case) of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste." Ross, "Uses of Camp," 139.

27. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 80.

28. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11–12.

29. The most powerful rendering of the myth is Homer's, and the best scholarly edition of this version that I am aware of is Helene P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

30. *Strait-Jacket* was a "dazzling" box-office success, but critically drubbed in its day, a reception that has endured. See John Law, *Scare Tactic: The Life & Films of William Castle* (iUniverse, 2000), 124–5.

31. Not to be confused with another Crawford vehicle with that name, from 1931, directed by Clarence Brown, the 1947 *Possessed*, as directed by the important and overlooked director Curtis Bernhardt, is one of the high points of 40s films and the exemplary fusion of the woman's film and film noir, featuring perhaps Crawford's finest performance as a woman slowly going mad over her unrequited love for a man, David (Van Heflin, peerlessly cold and contained), an architect who has an affair with her but doesn't love or want to marry her.

32. Crawford, like Bette Davis, goes through remarkable transformations throughout her career (the longest lasting star career in Hollywood history, ranging from the silent-era to the early 70s) that are then allegorized on a cinematic level; Crawford's film roles make transformation a central trope. In *Sadie McKee*, her servant girl transforms into rich man's wife; in Lewis Milestone's exquisite 1932 *Rain*, Crawford's South Seas harlot, plagued by the attentions of a preacher who wants to reform her (Walter Huston), oscillates between penitence and carnal avarice to a final resolute heartlessness; in the lovely Dorothy Arzner comedy-drama *The Bride Wore Red* (1937), one of the director's best, Crawford plays a young bar-maid who impersonates, at a rich man's whim, a socialite at a resort: the film is a veritable index of the female masquerade; in *A Woman's Face* (George Cukor, 1941), Crawford's heroine is a hideously disfigured woman whose physical ugliness bespeaks her criminal nature, just as her transformation into beauty-through-surgery signals a moral transformation as well; in her Oscar-winning *Mildred Pierce* (1945), directed by Michael Curtiz, Crawford transforms from pie-baking unhappy housewife to female tycoon, running a chain-restaurant company, *Mildred's*; in the excellent noir-melodrama *Flamingo Road* (1949), also directed by Curtiz, her carnival dancer and later waitress becomes a politician's wife, doing battle with her ambiguously-

motivated enemy, the politico-sheriff she calls the “fat man,” played by the inimitably vast and villainous Sydney Greenstreet. For an excellent reading of the significance of Crawford’s star-transformations over the decades, see Pamela Robertson, “Camping Under Western Stars: Joan Crawford in Johnny Guitar,” in her study *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 85-115.

33. Freud’s 1914 essay “On Narcissism: An Introduction” is collected in vol. 14 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. (Orig. pub. London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74; 1993), pp. 67-102. For feminist interpretations of psychoanalytic theories of female narcissism, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: a Feminist introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 131; Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

34. Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35-44. The article was first published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 10, 1929, 303-13).

35. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (1986; repr., , New York: Ballantine, 1989), *passim*.

36. In his characteristically astute analysis of Robert Aldrich films, Tony Williams makes note of several aspects of *Hush...Hush*: that it is classifiable within the new genre of “family-horror” films made in *Psycho*’s wake; that it is, like many other Aldrich films (such as the *The Big Knife* from 1955, starring Jack Palance, *Baby Jane*, and the 1968 *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, starring Kim Novak), a meta-Hollywood critique of the industry; that it is a critique as well of the classic-Hollywood story of female entrapment, like other Aldrich films with aging female stars such as the 1956 *Autumn Leaves*, starring Joan Crawford. Where I part company with Williams is in his support of the established view of *Hush...Hush* as a film that, while not without interest, is not the success that *Baby Jane* was. See Williams, *Body and Soul: The Cinematic Vision of Robert Aldrich* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 109, 190, 220.

37. Charles Derry makes the helpful observation that de Havilland’s Miriam is frequently photographed through a window, while Davis’s Charlotte is not. This touch suggests Miriam’s psychological disturbance, duplicity, and evil. Derry, *Dark Dreams: a Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film* (South Brunswick [N.J.]: A. S. Barnes, 1977), 38.

38. Vivien Leigh was offered the alternate lead role in *Hush...Hush* after Crawford’s part had to be recast. Reportedly, she responded that while she could bear to see Joan Crawford’s face at 6 AM, she couldn’t bear to look at Davis’s at that hour.

39. Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (rev.ed; New York: Harper & Row, 1987). Miller’s essay “Visual Pleasure in 1959” takes up the Russo discussion of *Suddenly, Last Summer*, and is collected in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1999), 97-129. Parker Tyler’s treatment of the film is especially blistering; see his *Screening the*



*Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1972; New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 306-311. I do not find the film homophobic to the degree that these critics do; moreover, I would argue that the Elizabeth Taylor character is not only our chief identification figure in the film but also deeply sympathetic in a manner that mitigates homophobia, in that she mourns as she narrates the grisly circumstances of the gay, predatory poet Sebastian Venable's death-by-cannibalism.

40. "The hystericization of women involved "a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex, was carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of the children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society." See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 147.

41. Problematizing the depiction of psychiatry here as corrupt is the figure of the kindly, if clueless, young psychiatrist-investigator who tries to discover the truth that Violet insists on cutting out of Catharine's brain. This role was played by gay icon and closeted gay actor Montgomery Clift, in a role that was surely awkward for him to perform.

42. After Pres breaks off his engagement from Julie and returns a year later, Julie greets him, this time in a stunning, penitent white dress in which she begs for his forgiveness and for him to take her back. Forgiveness can be offered, but marriage is impossible, as Pres is already wedded to an unexciting, steadfast Northern woman (Margaret Lindsay).

43. See Williams, *Body and Soul*.

44. Moorehead, for her part, camps up the role, looking as outré and disheveled as possible, deliciously mocking de Havilland's prissy elegance as she wipes her hands on ample apron-covered buttocks. But in her final scenes, Moorehead turns deadly serious, injecting the role and the bond between Velma and Charlotte with an almost unbearable poignancy and desperation, linked to the film's subtle class discourse. Isolated and dirt-poor Velma lacks the social power to rescue Charlotte. For an excellent analysis of Moorehead's career, see Patricia White, "Supporting Character: The Queer Career of Agnes Moorehead," in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 91-114.

45. Bellour, Raymond. *The Analysis of Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 259.

46. See Michie, *Sororophobia: Differences among Women in Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1992). The anguished nature of the bonds between the sisters in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* is also Phelan's focus in *Mourning Sex*.

47. Though slicker than *Strait-Jacket*, *Dead Ringer* is not as provocative a film. Once the impecunious "good" sister kills the wealthy "bad" sister, the film becomes tediously schematic. Still, the first third is superb, and once again reminds us that an analysis of class warfare is one of the signal political accomplishments of the horror-woman's film. The good sister—in the end, not particularly good—kills the bad in part to alleviate her financial difficulties and inhabit the other's wealth and privilege.

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